A Vagabond In Exile From The Gods

In the garden, the tall, old, Cherry tree is once again in bloom: from bursting buds to a dome of white within three days. Such a reminder, each Spring, of how so very numinous so many aspects of Nature can be when we, relucting, rise above such selfish self-absorption as keeps us beasts within. Such beauty, harming none.

Such beauty to pause my life at least for a moment: one moment of innarrable sadness brought forth by so many aspects of my past. The hubris; the selfishness; the fanaticism; the deeds done; the words written and spoken. So many, so very many such deeds and words – so much pain caused – that there is again that poignant dream of going back to some moment before such a suffering-causing deed was done; before emotive words were written or said; before some piece of propaganda was manufactured and distributed; before some person was hurt, injured, maimed, traumatised, or killed. A travelling back – somehow – to there be the different person I am now burdened by what I never knew, I could not know, I refused to know, then. An impossible journey, of course.

Thus I am obliged, yet again, to contemplate how our thousands of years old human culture of pathei-mathos – and why stupendously numinous music such as opening of JS Bach's St. John Passion, and the allegory of Jesus of Nazareth, and the perceiverations of Siddhartha Gautama, of Hillel The Elder, of Mohandas K. Gandhi, of so many others, and the honourable lives of people such as Edith Cavell – have not prevented, from each new generation of humans, a bringing-forth of those many who, like the extremist I was, incite hatred and intolerance; and those many who – subsumed by a hubriatic righteousness, an arrant certitude-of-knowing, and thus lacking in humility – spew forth rhetoric and propaganda in their crusade for some new war or some new conflict or for some new or old ideology; and those many who – subsumed with some dark personal desire or by a brutal egoism – rape, torture, deceive, manipulate, betray, steal, destroy, despoil.

It would be so easy, so very easy, so comforting, to take refuge, again – from the sadness that such an aeonic contemplation brings – in the promise of some-thing divine or suprapersonal beyond my – beyond our mortal – death. For that would at least make some sense of the continuing suffering that we mortals are subject to, often from others of our species but sometimes resulting from natural occurrences far beyond mere mortal control. A promise of, a belief in, some-thing divine or suprapersonal such as an after-life, or some sort of nirvana, or even something akin to the voyage described by Empedocles:

> ἔστιν Ἀνάγκης χρῆμα, θεῶν ψήφισμα παλαιόν,
> ἀίδιον, πλατέεσσι κατεσφρηγισμένον ὅρκοις·
> εὖτέ τις ἀμπλακίησι φόνωι φίλα γυῖα μιήνηι,
> νείκεΐ θ' ὅς κε ἐπίορκον ἁμαρτήσας ἐπομόσσηι,
> δαίμονες οἵτε μακραίωνος λελάχασι βίοιο,
> τρίς μιν μυρίας ὧρας ἀπὸ μακάρων ἀλάλησθαι,
> φυομένους παντοῖα διὰ χρόνου εἴδεα θνητῶν
> ἀργαλέας βιότοιο μεταλλάσσοντα κελεύθους.
> αἰθέριον μὲν γάρ σφε μένος πόντονδε διώκει,
> πόντος δ' ἐς χθονὸς οὖδας ἀπέπτυσε, γαῖα δ' ἐς αὐγὰς
> ἠελίου φαέθοντος, ὁ δ' αἰθέρος ἔμβαλε δίναις·
> ἄλλος δ' ἐξ ἄλλου δέχεται, στυγέουσι δὲ πάντες.
> τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι, φυγάς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης,
> Νείκεϊ μαινομένωι πίσυνος. [1]

For me, there is a knowing of how limited and fallible my knowledge and understanding are, combined with an intangible intimation of some-thing possibly existing which is so abstruse that any and all attempts – at least by me – to meld it into words, and thus form and confine it into some idea or ideas, would miss or distort its essence. An intimation of what terms such as 'acausal' and 'numinous' (and even θεός/θεοί) do little to describe, hinting as such terms do of externalities – of an 'out there' – whereas this some-thing is an intrinsic part of us, connecting us to all life, human, terran, and otherwise, and thus reveals our φύσις – our relation to beings and Being – behind the appearance that is our conception of our separate self. An intimation thus of our brief causality of mortal life being only one momentary microcosmic presencing of that-which we it seems have a faculty to apprehend, and a that-which which lives-on both before and after our brief moment of apprehended causal life.

Yet this some-thing that I sense is no mystical divinity of a supra-personal love to be saught individually and which, if found or gifted to us, eremitically removes us from the mortal pains and joys of life. Suffering, and the pain so caused, are real; and if we ourselves are unafflicted, others are not and may never be so unafflicted if we humans do not or cannot fundamentally change.

But, for now and as a new Spring burgeons forth, all I in my unknowing and voyaging can do is hope for a better understanding, agreeing as I do with what the Chorus say at the very end of Oedipus Tyrannus:

> ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντα κείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδεῖν
> ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν᾽ ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν
> τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινὸν παθών

Therefore look toward that ending which is for us mortals
To observe that particular day – calling no one lucky until,
Without the pain of injury, they are conveyed beyond life's ending.

David Myatt
Early Spring, 2014
In memory of Sue, died April 4th 1993

Notes

[1] *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Diels-Kranz, B115. My translation is:

"There exists an insight by Ananke, an ancient resolution
Of the gods, immutable and sealed by vows,
Regarding when one of the daimons – those whose allotted portion of life is long –
Has their own hands stained from murder
Or who, once having sworn an oath, because of some feud breaks that oath.
For they shall for ten thousand tripled seasons wander away from the beautified,
Begotten during that period in all manner of mortal form
And exchanging during that voyage one vexation for another:

The fierce Ætherials chase them to the Sea,
The Sea spits them out onto dusty ground,
Gaia hurls them to the burning light of the Sun
Who flings them back to those swirling Ætherials.
Moved from one to the other, all detest them.
I am one of those, a vagabond in exile from the gods
Who has to rely on strongful Disagreement."

Ananke (Ἀνάγκης) is the primordial goddess of incumbency; that is, of wyrd – of that which is beyond, and the origin of, what we often describe as our Fate as a mortal being.

Disagreement (νεῖκος) is – according to what we can adduce of the philosophy of Empedocles from the fragments of his writings that we possess – a fundamental principle, and one understood in relation to another fundamental principle, Φιλότης, expressive as they both are of the logos (λόγος) by which we can possibly apprehend the workings of the cosmic order (κόσμος). However, the common translations – of 'strife' and 'love' respectively – do not in my view express what Empedocles seems to be trying to convey, which is 'disagreement' and 'fellowship' (a communal or kindred working-together in pursuit of a common interest or goal). For while disagreement sometimes disrupts fellowship, it is often necessary as the genesis of productive change.

Thus, just as Odysseus had to rely on the support of the goddess Athena, who disagreed with how Poseidon treated Odysseus, so does the 'vagabond in exile from the gods' – so expressively portrayed by Empedocles – rely on disagreements to end their own exile.

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